

BUDDHA AMITABHA

THE UNBOUNDED

LIGHT

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One of the disciples came to the Blessed One with a trembling heart and his mind full of doubt. And he asked the Blessed One: "O Buddha, our Lord and Master, in what way do we give up the pleasures of the world, if thou forbiddest us to work miracles and to attain the supernatural? Is not Amitabha, the infinite light of revelation, the source of innumerable miracles?"

And the Blessed One, seeing the anxiety of a truth seeking mind, said: "O savaka, thou art a novice among the novices, and thou art swimming on the surface of samsara. How long will it take thee to grasp the truth? Thou hast not understood the words of the Tathagata. The law of karma is unbreakable, and supplications have no effect, for they are empty words."

Said the disciple: "Sayest thou there are no miraculous and wonderful things?"

The Blessed One replied: "Is it not a wonderful thing, mysterious and miraculous to the worldling, that a man who commits wrong can become a saint, that by attaining true enlightenment he will find the path of truth and abandon the evil ways of selfishness? The bhikkhu who renounces the transient pleasures of the world for the eternal bliss of holiness, performs the only miracle that can truly be called a miracle. A holy man changes the curses of karma into blessings. But the desire to perform miracles arises either from covetousness or from vanity. The mendicant does right who does not think: "People should salute me; who, though despised by the world, yet cherishes no ill-will towards it. That mendicant does right to whom omens, meteors,

dreams, and signs are things abolished; he is free from all their evils. Amitabha, the unbounded light, is the source of wisdom, of virtue, of Buddhahood. The deeds of sorcerers and miracle-mongers are frauds, but what is more wondrous, more mysterious, more miraculous than Amitabha?"

"But, Master," continued the savaka, is the promise of the happy region vain talk and a myth?"

"What is this promise?" asked the Buddha; and the disciple replied: "There is in the west a paradise called the Pure Land, exquisitely adorned with gold and silver and precious gems. There are pure waters with golden sands, surrounded by pleasant walks and covered with large lotus flowers. Joyous music is heard, and flowers rain down three times a day. There are singing birds whose harmonious notes proclaim the praises of religion, and in the minds of those who listen to their sweet sounds, remembrance arises of the Buddha, the law, and the brotherhood. No evil birth is possible there, and even the name of hell is unknown. He who fervently and with a pious mind repeats the words 'Amitabha Buddha' will be transported to the happy region of this pure land, and when death draws nigh, the Buddha, with a company of saintly followers, will stand before him, and there will be perfect tranquility."

"In truth," said the Buddha, "there is such a happy paradise. But the country is spiritual and it is accessible only to those that are spiritual. Thou sayest it lies in the west. This means, look for it where he who enlightens the world resides. The sun

sinks down and leaves us in utter darkness, the shades of night steal over us, and Mara, the evil one, buries our bodies in the grave. Sunset is nevertheless no extinction, and where we imagine we see extinction, there is boundless light and inexhaustible life."

"I understand," said the savaka that the story of the Western Paradise is not literally true."

"Thy description of paradise," the Buddha continued, "is beautiful; yet it is insufficient and does little justice to the glory of the pure land. The worldly can speak of it in a worldly way only; they use worldly similes and worldly words. But the pure land in which the pure live is more beautiful than thou canst say or imagine. However, the repetition of the name Amitabha Buddha is meritorious only if thou speak it with such a devout attitude of mind as will cleanse thy heart and attune thy will to do works of righteousness. He only can reach the happy land whose soul is filled with the infinite light of truth. He only can live and breathe in the spiritual atmosphere of the Western Paradise who has attained enlightenment. I say to thee, the Tathagata lives in the pure land of eternal bliss even now while he is still in the body. The Tathagata preaches the law of religion unto thee and unto the whole world, so that thou and thy brethren may attain the same peace, the same happiness."

Said the disciple: "Teach me, O Lord, the meditations to which I must devote myself in order to let my mind enter into the paradise of the pure land."

Buddha said: "There are five meditations. The first meditation is the meditation of love in which thou must so adjust thy heart that thou longest for the weal and welfare of all beings, including the happiness of thine enemies.

"The second meditation is the meditation of pity, in which thou thinkest of all beings in distress, vividly representing in thine imagination their sorrows and anxieties so as to arouse a deep compassion for them in thy soul.

"The third meditation is the meditation of joy in which thou thinkest of the prosperity of others and rejoicest with their rejoicings.

"The fourth meditation is the meditation on impurity, in which thou considerest the evil consequences of corruption, the effects of wrongs and evils. How trivial is often the pleasure of the moment and how fatal are its consequences!

"The fifth meditation is the meditation on serenity, in which thou risest above love and hate, tyranny and thralldom, wealth and want, and regardest thine own fate with impartial calmness and perfect tranquility.

"A true follower of the Tathagata founds not his trust upon austerities or rituals, but giving up the idea of self relies with his whole heart upon Amitabha, which is the unbounded light of truth."

The Blessed One after having explained his doctrine of Amitabha, the immeasurable light which makes him who receives it a Buddha, looked into the heart of his disciple and saw still some doubts and anxieties. And the Blessed One said: "Ask me, my son, the questions which weigh upon thy soul."

The disciple said: "Can a humble monk, by sanctifying himself, acquire the talents of supernatural wisdom called Abhinna and the supernatural powers called Iddhi? Show me the Iddhi-pada, the path to the highest wisdom. Open to me the Jhanas which are the means of acquiring samadhi, the fixity of mind which enraptures the soul. And the Blessed One said: "Which are the Abhinna?"

The disciple replied: "There are six Abhinna: The celestial eye; the celestial ear; the body at will or the power of transformation; the knowledge of the destiny of former dwellings, so as to know former states of existence; the faculty of reading the thoughts of others; and the knowledge of comprehending the finality of the stream of life."

And the Blessed One replied: "These are wondrous things; but verily, every man can attain them. Consider the abilities of thine own mind; thou wert born about two hundred leagues from here and canst thou not in thy thought, in an instant travel to thy native place and remember the details of thy father's home? Seest thou not with thy mind eye the roots of the tree which is shaken by the wind without being overthrown? Does not the collector of herbs see in his mental vision, whenever he pleases, any plant with its roots, its stem, its fruits, leaves, and even the uses to which it can be applied? Cannot the man who understands languages recall to his mind any word whenever he pleases, knowing its exact meaning and import? How much more does the Tathagata understand the nature of things; he looks into the hearts of men and reads their thoughts. He knows the evolution of beings and foresees their ends."

Said the disciple: "Then the Tathagata teaches that man can attain through the Jhanas the bliss of Abhinna." And the Blessed One asked in reply: "Which are the Jhanas through which man reaches Abhinna?"

The disciple replied: "There are four Jhanas. The first Jhana is seclusion in which one must free his mind from sensuality; the second Jhana is a tranquility of mind full of joy and gladness; the third Jhana is a taking delight in things spiritual; the fourth Jhana is a state of perfect purity and peace in which the mind is above all gladness and grief."

"Good, my son," enjoined the Blessed One. "Be sober and abandon wrong practices which serve only to stultify the mind." Said the disciple: "Forbear with me, O Blessed One, for I have faith without understanding and I am seeking the truth. O Blessed One, O Tathagata, my Lord and Master, teach me the Iddhipada."

The Blessed One said: "There are four means by which Iddhi is acquired: Prevent bad qualities from arising. Put away bad qualities which have arisen. Produce goodness that does not yet exist. Increase goodness which already exists.-Search with sincerity, and persevere in the search. In the end thou wilt find the truth."